

*— An Essay —*  
*De Superstitionibus Medicis*  
*Respectfully Submitted*  
*to the Faculty of the*  
*Homoeopathic Medical College*  
*of Pennsylvania*

*— on the —*  
*Thirtieth day of January*  
*Eighteen hundred and fifty four*

*— by —*  
*Chester W. Scott*  
*of Vermont.*  
*— — —*

It is not proposed in treating on  
this subject, to bring forward anything  
new, or which has never before been noticed,  
but solely to mention some of the more  
common errors, and fallacies, to which the  
human race have been subject, from the  
earliest period even to the present time.

It is surprising and at the same time  
humiliating, when we consider that even  
with a mind emanating from God, capable  
of considering, reflecting, and of becoming  
gigantic in power and knowledge, should  
notwithstanding have one general and univers-  
al failing. Not devoid in a preference for

It is not proposed in treating on this subject, to bring forward anything new, or which has never before been noticed, but merely to mention some of the more common errors, and fallacies, to which the human race have been subject, from the earliest period even to the present time.

It is surprising and at the same time humiliating, when we consider that man, with a mind emanating from God, capable of considering, reflecting, and of becoming gigantic in power and knowledge, should, notwithstanding, have one general and universal failing point, evinced in a preference for



the marvellous and extraordinary, over that which is plain, natural, and to a good degree comprehensible.—

It is a fact beyond dispute, that mankind have, throughout all ages been thus addicted; and it is not only the ignorant and credulous that have thus fallen into error, and that during the darker ages, but even at the present time, when boasted science has spread her broad wings over our land, empiricism and superstition abounds, ensnaring many of the great and the good.—

We do not pretend that superstition is chargeable upon no other science, but that of

medicine, but we do think there is more of it manifested in this particular branch, than in any other:—at any rate its results are more disastrous.—

This is not so much to be wondered at, when we consider that the nature of disease, and the art of curing it, have always to a great extent, been beyond the knowledge of the common people;—besides, disease generally awakens fear, and fear and ignorance are the acknowledged parents of superstitions.—

In the earlier days it was far different than it is at the present time.—

Then, medical science was in its em-

bryotic state;—diseases were few and uncomplicated in comparison to what they are at this time;—instead of being looked upon as the result of a violation of some one or more of Nature's laws, they were regarded as the visitation of evil spirits, directed by the wrath of their imaginary gods, whom they supposed resided in the planets, and overruled the affairs of men.—

With these ideas, it was but natural that when afflicted, they would look in this direction for relief;—and thus sprang into existence, myriads of superstitious rites and ceremonies.—



Yet, notwithstanding this general superstition, there were those who taught that it was absolutely necessary that medicines should be taken;—and there are many remedies in use at the present time, identically used centuries ago.—

Medical science has not stood entirely still, but it has not kept pace with science of other departments.—What, may be asked is the cause of this?—The answer is obvious to any one who takes into consideration the thousand errors and fallacies, which have been thrown in its way,

rendering its progress almost impossible, not from the amount of importance with which they are attacked, but from the eagerness with which the multitude seize upon everything which is new and wonderful. —

It is a fact attested by all ages, that there are those who seem to have a gift of deception, and who, for the purpose of gaining wealth and notoriety, impudently throw themselves and their miserable doctrines, in opposition to the great cause of Truth, and the progress of knowledge. — They hesitate not to take advantage of the public weakness



which we have alluded to as being particular in this direction, and will trumpet forth with brazen face, some worse than useless compound, with which they themselves are wholly unacquainted, as being some "All potent Panacea" for every ill which flesh is heir to.—

Thus it is that while the man of science stands forth, laboring to convince and reform, the multitude are listening to the artful and beguiling words of impostors, and time which flies so swiftly, and which might have been used in bringing before the world, great and important discoveries, is

wasted away, in opposing worse than worthless things, and minds adapted for the diligent and successful search after truth, are turned aside from these high and noble pursuits, and worn out in overcoming error. —

It has been observed — and truly too, — that there is no truth however pure and sacred, upon which falsehood cannot fasten and engraft — itself

We shall find when examining closely some of the various medical superstitions, that have, from time to time, come before the world, that nearly all have contained some germ of truth, though

surrounded with much that was false and erroneous. - It may also be said that nearly every "nostrum" which has been blazoned forth as an universal curative, has contained some remedial agent, which, if placed in proper hands and used in proper diseases, would be of much value. -

Another and lamentable circumstance in regard to medical superstitions is seen in the fact, that however plain it may appear, that they have arisen from ignorance or design, yet there is no lack for followers, and even in the "medical profession" itself,



are found those who are ready to aid in holding forth its standard.—

It is true that to a certain extent, empiricism and experimentalism becomes absolutely necessary; and though one simple fact in medicine is better than a world of reasoning, yet we may argue and theorise until time itself shall grow old, and even then, we shall find that empiricism must be resorted to in very many cases.—

Undue scepticism in medicine, is often times as dangerous as undue credulity;—we are bound in this, as in many other matters, to believe many

things that we can neither explain,  
nor understand. — We know by experi-  
ence that many remedies prepared prop-  
erly and administered according to the  
great law "*Similia Similibus Curantur*"  
act specifically in curing certain forms  
of disease; — yet the precise manner  
in which the action takes place is  
often beyond the scope of our knowledge.

Surely, we should most clearly show  
our folly, should we neglect to call in  
their aid, merely because we were ig-  
norant of their "modus operandi".

Yet, after making due allowance  
for cases like the above, there still re-

mains an abundant supply of filthy trash, standing forth so naked in its absurdity, so repugnant to all reason and common sense, so contrary to the established laws, not only of science, but of nature, that we feel compelled to disbelieve them, though they may at first sight have been possessed of many apparent, and plausible proofs of truth.-

Let us look for example at the ideas that the ancient-Alchemists held forth concerning the "Philosopher's Stone" which would turn everything into gold; and further, that this gold might be transferred to the human body and by



its permanency life and health  
could be maintained for hundreds  
of years, even approaching immor-  
tality; ~~thus~~ <sup>surplunting</sup> the designs  
and intentions of the All wise Cre-  
ator Himself.

Strange and infatuated as such  
doctrines appear, yet we must say  
that they <sup>compare</sup> favorably with some of the  
diabolical "isms" that are among  
us at the present day.

It cannot be supposed that all who  
advocate these "fallacies" believe in  
them, but there is such a desire  
in some to become great in the

eyes of the multitude, that they hesitate not to unite themselves with anything provided it be popular; they are first seduced, and in their turn become seducers. — But let us look at popular credulity as it exists at the present day. — We need but refer to our newspapers, and we shall find its columns crowded with such a mass of nonsense, so filthy and obscene, so libelous upon the better judgement of the people, that it would seem to prove, that there exists among us, characters, far worse than any that cursed our ancestors. — And yet, these wily impostors are

Possessed of such very "Philanthropic spirits"  
that they are willing to vend their  
"health preserving mixtures" at so low  
a price that even the poor may par-  
take of the blessing!-

They hesitate not to proclaim that  
their invaluable receipts have been  
preserved from oblivion, by being hand-  
ed down with the wills of their no-  
ble ancestors; - and thus, the names of  
many, who should have been held in  
saered memory, and suffered to rest  
in peace, have been exhumed and ap-  
pended to a lie, to serve the purposes  
of base deception; - and notwithstanding



all this, the great mass seem willing and eager to aid them onward.

It is sad to reflect, that ignorant and designing men should be allowed to tifle with the lives, and health of their fellow men, while others, who are burning the "midnight-oil" and shortening their days for the good of the human race, so often live in neglect, and die in want. —

And how, it may be asked, — does the "Dorack" succeed in gaining the confidence of the community? — It is from the fact, that until the days of Hahnemann, medical science had no sure

foundation, and consequently was tossed, to and fro, by every idle wind.—

The professed Physician, knowing the subtlety of disease, and the uncertainty of remedies, ever hesitates to speak with too much confidence;—but the Quack, ignorant of both, hesitates not to make any, and every promise which to him holds forth gain.

As a result the community have conceived the idea of "every man his own Doctor"; thinking also that it matters little, whether their purchases are made from the professional or non-professional, as both are called medicine.

It is true, that diseases get well while taking "Patent medicines";—so does the deluded Indian recover from his ills, while the "Sorcerer" leaps and howls around him;—yet who, among civilized nations, will pretend to say that man can hold disease by charm?—

It is well known that the mind holds a powerful influence over the body.—The Quack taking advantage of this, inspires his patient with hope, which, in many cases brings about a favorable result;—But the amount of good thus accomplished, is a trifle in comparison with the evil which obtains in other



cases;—for, many have been the instances where disease has been lurking about the system, and some useless "nostrum" has been employed, until time has given the disease an opportunity to fasten itself with an unyielding grasp.

And is there no way by which the science of medicine, and the people themselves may be shielded from this "pestilence that walketh at noon day"?—

Is there no way by which the community can see this "fell destroyer" as it is?—

Surely the subject should be examined by all. We believe that to a great extent, Homoeopathy is destined to sweep back, this tide,

of error;—but there is a world of ignorance and prejudice to overcome, and aids should be brought in from every source. Legal enactments should be instituted, having the power to forbid, and suppress this odious, wholesale Quackery.—

It is beyond all reason, that any one remedy should be capable of curing all forms, and conditions of disease.—

Every new remedy, or proceeding, which promises too much, should be looked upon with suspicion, and examined with caution;—and it is by the "Homoeopathic rules of proving" that we are able to test the actual value, of every remedial

agent. It may ~~be~~ urged that such restrictions would prevent many useful and valuable discoveries;—but there is no law by which talent can be bound;—no difficulties but genius will surmount.—

There can be no brighter example of this, than that seen in the great and illustrious Hahnemann, who, though loaded with scorn and contempt, yet he bid defiance to all opposition, labored with almost superhuman perseverance, and as a result succeeded in dragging from oblivion, a principle, or law which, with a basis firm as the



mountains, true as revelation, and en-  
during as time, is fast establishing  
the "healing art" where it should be,—  
beyond the reach of error, and heath-  
enish superstition.—

Hahnemann, taught that the "medical  
art" was but the elucidation of natural  
phenomena;—and like nature's laws,  
is mysterious only in its simplicity.—  
Thousands are now living, reaping the  
benefits of his toil, and tens of thousands  
shall yet arise to honor his memory.—  
Hahnemann, "rests from his labors" but  
"his works follow him".—